

GLOSSARY OF LITERARY TERMS

All page numbers refer to *The Storyteller* anthology.

Allegory: An extended narrative, where a second meaning runs parallel to the surface story. See "Going to Jerusalem" (page 94).

Allusion: A reference to a historical figure, a famous event, a literary work, or a literary person (actual or fictional) in a work of art. See "The Wind and a Boy" (page 21).

Anecdote: A brief description of an interesting or amusing incident or experience. See "Mr. Selfsame" (page 98).

Archetype: The original model, type, story. A basic pattern or concept common to people of different times and cultures. A pattern, character, situation frequently found in literature or folklore. The saviour figure in "The Rain Came" (page 28) is an archetype.

Atmosphere: The mood that dominates a work of art, be it fear, darkness, joy. The atmosphere of "Akhnito" (page 205) is one of darkness and eerie tension. Compare mood.

Autobiographical Writing: Writing in which the author's own experience is prominent. Gabrielle Roy, like the narrator in her story "The Dead Child" (page 186), was a schoolteacher in rural Manitoba.

Avant-garde: (The "advance guard.") The innovative, the experimental in the arts. Both "The Blue Bouquet" (page 142) and "Akhnito" (page 205) are avant-garde stories.

Characters: The individuals who people the story. Many short stories are principally an exploration of character; the focus is on personality and interpersonal relationships. "The First Death of Her Life" (page 91) is an example.

Climax: The point of highest emotional intensity in a novel, drama, or story. In "The Rages of Mrs. Torrens" (page 219), the climax comes when Kathleen wrecks the company office after her husband loses his fingers in an accident.

Close Reading: Attention to the precise details of the text. Close reading is the basis of a deeper understanding of a work of literature.

Conflict: The tension in a story, caused by opposing forces. Usually conflict is between one person and another, but it may also be a person versus nature or society. Sometimes the conflict is internal, as in the case of "Gregory" (page 153), where the narrator strug-

gles with contradictory feelings about executing the prisoner.

Context: The conditions under which the author lives and writes; the background to the story.

Contrast: Differences and/or oppositions between two things or two parts of the same thing. There is a clear contrast between the first and second halves of "Father and I" (page 118).

Crisis: The turning point in a story. Climax is the prime moment of emotion; crisis is simply a structural moment in the storyline. Nai Phan being held up by the robber in "Who Needs It?" (page 81) faces a crisis, but the climax is when the robber gives him the gun.

Dialogue: Conversation between characters in a story. Dialogue is often used to delineate a character's personality or to advance the plot. "The Ninny" (page 115) is told almost completely through dialogue.

Didactic: Descriptive of a story whose intention is to teach as well as to inform. The story "Paper" (page 75)—about the folly of pursuing wealth as one's main goal—has a didactic purpose.

Dilemma: A choice between two equally distasteful courses of action. If the soldiers in "Gregory" (page 153) do not obey Headquarters and execute their prisoner, they will be court-martialled and shot. If they kill him, they will have slain a friend.

Discursive Fiction: The story's focus is on ideas rather than on plot or character. In "The Nonrevolutionaries" (page 70) the author wishes to acquaint us with the painful historical realities in her native land.

Dream Sequence: The irrational images and sequences of a dream are incorporated into an otherwise conventional narrative. In "Twilight" (page 163), the narrator falls asleep and dreams about the disturbing events in her past.

Epiphany: A moment of sudden, profound revelation and wonder. A person sometimes experiences an epiphany when observing something ordinary. It can also be a moment of clarification, illumination, or insight gleaned from reading a story. "A Son's Return" (page 105) features a mother's epiphany about her son's character.

Existentialism: Existence precedes essence. The focus is on survival, on the "now." An individual looks not to a higher authority but to himself or herself for personal meaning in life. The older waiter in "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" (page 200) must develop his own

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code for dealing with the *nada* (emptiness) of his daily life. There are also shades of the existentialist philosophy in "The Guest" (page 9).

Fable: A short story that presents a moral. Fables often feature animals as characters. In "The Giraffe" (page 100), everything changes for the young boys after the giraffe comes to town.

Fiction: Made up, invented, imagined rather than actual and real. The characters in fiction have never lived in reality, yet many of them seem more real than the people we know. This is the magic of fiction.

First-person Story: The author presents everything from one person's perspective. The pronoun "I" or the adjective "my" indicate a first-person story. In "Father and I" (page 118), the first-person narrator, an adult, remembers a strange happening when he was a child on a Sunday walk with his father.

Flashback: A pause in the narrative to look back. See "Swaddling Clothes" (page 64).

Foil: A contrast; something or someone that highlights the qualities of some other thing or person by being different or opposite. Compare the two mothers and the two daughters in "The Stolen Party" (page 123).

Folktale: A story, usually anonymous, passed on orally and later collected and written down by someone. "The Rain Came" (page 28) imitates the folktale form.

Foreshadowing: A veiled hint of a later moment in the story. Elements of foreshadowing can only be recognized after the entire story has been read. In "The Blue Bouquet" (page 142), the narrator is confronted by a mugger who wants his eyes. The man who warned the narrator not to go out at night was the one-eyed hotel owner.

Frame Story: A story that holds another story inside it. In "The Czech Dog" (page 171), a story about the resistance movement in Czechoslovakia during World War II is told to a lady in New York. There are two dogs in the story: the collie in the frame story and the emaciated dog in the story-within-the-story.

Genre: The type or form of literature. In the case of prose fiction, there are the novel, the novella, the short story, and, the newest genre, the short short story.

Gothic: In literature, the use of supernatural/eerie elements to evoke an atmosphere of terror, horror, fear. See "The Vampire" (page 87) and "Father and I" (page 118).

Imagism: The creation of vivid visual images through words. See "Akhnito" (page 205) and "The Blue Bouquet" (page 142).

Impressionism: The story rides on a succession of details. The linearity of plot is downplayed in favour of quick brush strokes of feelings and sensory impressions. See "Between Earth and Sky" (page 229).

"In Medias Res": From the Latin, meaning "in the middle of things." Many stories begin this way, picking up the storyline right in the middle of the action. "Tuesday Siesta" (page 135) is an example.

Interior Monologue: The story is told from inside the narrator's head, in the flow of inner thoughts and feelings. "Between Earth and Sky" (page 229) features an interior monologue.

Irony: The reality is the opposite of what is expected, said, or done. There is a strong current of irony in "Paper" (page 75).

Juxtaposition: Two things placed side by side to create a special effect. In this way the author makes a connection between things that usually aren't related. In "Swaddling Clothes" (page 64), the unfortunate baby is juxtaposed with the homeless, destitute, and potentially dangerous man.

Memoir: A record of a person's own experiences; autobiography. "Blue Winds Dancing" (page 211) may be a memoir.

Mood: The unifying tone or attitude in a story, whether of cynicism, optimism, sentimentality, nostalgia, or some other feeling. Compare *atmosphere*.

Motif: A recurring idea, theme, phrase, or pattern in a work of art. The nature motif in "Blue Winds Dancing" (page 211) is central to the story.

Motivation: Why one does what one does. Usually motivation comes from within.

Myth: A story in a mythology, which is a system of interrelated stories that explains the world's workings. "Sunrise on the Veld" (page 42) contains references to the classical myths of Narcissus and Echo.

Nihilism: (*Nihil* is Latin for "nothing.") A rejection of any certainty in knowledge, truth, meaning in life. See "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" (page 200).

Omniscient: A third-person story with an all-knowing narrator. The word is derived from Latin *omnis* ("all") and *scio* ("I know"). "The Story of an Hour" (page 197) is related by an omniscient narrator.

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Open-ended: Some stories end with a resolution or a message that creates a sense of closure. Other stories are open-ended; they pose an uncertainty for the reader to puzzle over.

Parable: A story that teaches a truth or moral lesson. The major intent of a parable is comparison: A is compared to B, so that the meaning, the intent, the teaching may be easily grasped. "A Son's Return" (page 105) gives a new twist to the biblical parable of the prodigal son.

Parody: The comic imitation of something serious. Parody is often used in *satire*. See "Mr. Selfsame" (page 98).

Persona: The voice/personality the author adopts to tell the story. Even in an *autobiographical* story, the persona of the narrator is different from the actual author. The narrator of "B. Wordsworth" (page 145) adopts the persona of himself as a small child.

Plausible: Believable/consistent/real people in real situations. See "The Loons" (page 176).

Plot: The sequence of events in a story.

Point of View: The way a story is told, presented, or narrated; the vantage point of the narrator. "The Ninny" (page 115) would be a very different story if told from the viewpoint of Yulia, the governess, rather than that of her employer.

Proletarian Fiction: Fiction that deals with the lives of the workers; working-class fiction; blue-collar fiction.

Realism: Life as it is, in minute detail. See "Tuesday Siesta" (page 135) and "The Doll's House" (page 233).

Response: The reader's intellectual and emotional reaction to a work of art. Before questioning, analysis, and discussion comes the personal response, the personal relationship between story and reader.

Satire: A work that exposes the follies and the weaknesses of a person or an institution. Satire is written to effect change or purely for entertainment. See "The Elephant" (page 111) for a satire on the ineptitude of bureaucracy.

Setting: The place, the physical backdrop of a story. "Blue Winds Dancing" (page 211) places great emphasis on setting as the narrator travels from an urban environment to his home on a Native reservation.

Short Short Story: Sometimes called flash fiction or quick fiction, this genre of prose fiction is extremely

short, sometimes only a paragraph or two in length. See "Mr. Selfsame" (page 98).

Slice of Life: A moment in the lives of the characters. Realistic treatment of one central event is the key to this approach to short fiction. See "The Story of an Hour" (page 197).

Stream of Consciousness: The flow and flux of thoughts and feelings as they pass through a narrator or character's mind. In "Gregory" (page 153), the reader is placed in the narrator's stream of consciousness as his finger tightens on the trigger. "Between Earth and Sky" (page 229) is a stream-of-consciousness narrative.

Style: The way an author writes, including choice of diction, images, sentence patterns, and artistic devices.

Surprise Ending: The reader is caught off-guard by the story's conclusion. See "The Story of An Hour" (page 197).

Suspense: What will happen next? The story keeps the reader reading to see how the events unfold and how the story resolves itself. Some stories never reach a resolution; for example, "The Third Bank of the River" (page 129).

Symbol: Something that stands for or suggests something else; for example, the unscheduled ghost train in "Father and I" (page 118), or the green truck without brakes in "The Wind and a Boy" (page 21).

Symbolism: Using one thing to stand for something else; the employment of symbols in a work of art.

Synopsis: A brief summary of the main aspects of a story.

Tall Tale: An exaggerated, hard-to-believe story, often told in a boastful, extravagant manner. In "The Whale" (page 192), Ambrose claims he caught a whale with a fish hook.

Theme: The central idea, meaning, point in a story.

Time Frame: The temporal setting of a story or part of a story.

Title: A hint, a clue, a signpost, a summation. The title often adds an extra layer of meaning to a story.

Tone: The artist's attitude about or position on the story he or she is telling.

Universal Time: The story transcends any one particular age or time. In "Ha'penny" (page 37) the little boy's desire to have a mother and belong to a family is universal.